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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000145

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE LINGERING IMPACT OF GOT GAZA RHETORIC

REF: A. ANKARA 86

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 38

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Erdogan's harsh condemnation of GOI actions during the recent Gaza crisis continues to impact Turkey's Jewish minority and its bilateral relationship with Israel. Jewish Community leaders in Istanbul told the Ambassador that while they had previously enjoyed a close relationship with the GOT, this changed over the last four weeks as they faced heightened anti-Semitism spurred by heated political rhetoric. While they did acknowledge that the police were supportive and President Gul had called to express his concern, the leadership worries about the future of the Jewish Community in Turkey. Echoing their sentiments, Israeli Ambassador Gabi Levi remarked that it would take time for the bilateral relationship to normalize and would require the GOT to take constructive public action. Levi noted that he was surprised by the magnitude of the public reaction. End Summary.

Growing Anti-Semitism Worries

[1](#)2. (C) Chief Rabbi Haleva and members of the Jewish Community leadership expressed their concern about rising anti-Semitism during a January 23 courtesy call by the Ambassador. Chief Rabbi Haleva explained that Turkey's Jewish minority is "in a state of shock." Leadership of the Jewish Community of Turkey expressed disappointment over what they perceived as the deterioration of values, adding that "Turkey is not the same Turkey." Jewish Community President Sylvio Ovadya explained that the Jewish Community has had no problems with exercising freedom of religion, only serious concerns with the recent increase in anti-Semitism. Board member of the Secular Council of the Jewish Community, Daniel Navarro, said that the Jewish Community enjoyed a close relationship with the GOT until the beginning of Israel's most recent attacks against Hamas. Due to Gaza, he said, the GOT adopted an anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish attitude worse than the Community had witnessed in fifty years.

[1](#)3. (C) Public relations official for the Jewish Community Deniz Saporta pointed out several events that portended a negative shift in the GOT's views toward Israel, which itself motivated an unprecedented press statement by the Community on January 15. First, anti-Israel demonstrations started immediately, even before the Community knew what was occurring in Gaza. This gave the impression, she said, that the demonstrations were being orchestrated by the GOT, or at least that the GOT was complicit. Demonstrators in front of

the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul scattered yellow paper stars with the word "Jew" for pedestrians to walk on. Finally, the Community expressed dismay in reaction to the Ministry of National Education's directive that all schools observe a mandatory moment of silence on January 13 (ref a). Community leaders condemned the directive, saying it introduced elements of collective hatred into the minds of small children. Finally, they were significantly concerned by what they perceived as PM Erdogan's reframing of Israeli-Palestinian conflict into one of Jews versus Muslims. Saporta pointed to a speech in which Erdogan said "Muslims are being killed," pulling in a religious component that had not been evident in the Lebanon crisis of 2006.

14. (C) The Jewish Community leadership did identify several positive points despite their concerns, noting that they have felt supported by the police "since day one." Also, Navarro related that his wife received a phone call from President Abdullah Gul earlier in the week in which he conveyed his concern and support. The phone call was later described in a piece by "Radikal" columnist Ismet Berkan who praised the sensitivity of the President.

Mending Bilateral Relations Will Take Time

15. (C) Israeli Ambassador Gabi Levi told Ambassador January 27 that bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey have soured due to inflammatory language employed by PM Erdogan and other Turkish politicians, which has continued even after the ceasefire. Before the relationship can normalize, GOT

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officials will need to make positive public statements in support of Turkey's ties with Israel. We will be cautious for the next few months, he added. When asked what Prime Ministry Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu contributed to resolving the Gaza crisis, Levi replied "nothing." Due to the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship, however, the GOI was polite in its dealings with him.

16. (C) The Israeli and Turkish MFAs, nevertheless, are in almost daily contact. FMs Babacan and Livni discussed the Gaza situation and Hamas's role before he left for the January 26 EU Foreign Ministerial. (Note: Addressing journalists in Brussels, Babacan said that Hamas must decide if it wants to be an armed organization or a political movement. Turkey does not support Hamas' "past mistakes.") Levi reported there are several upcoming opportunities to rebuild the relationship. Prime Ministers Olmert and Erdogan are both at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He added that the GOI intentionally did not request a meeting with Erdogan to send the message that his rhetoric was too harsh. President Gul, who used a much more measured tone in his public statements, may reschedule his postponed December visit to Israel for next May and use the opportunity to address the Knesset.

17. (C) Levi said that he was surprised by the magnitude of the Turkish reaction, adding he had assumed it would be similar to demonstrations in 2006 during the Israel-Lebanon conflict. He noted that Turkish academics attribute this change to an increased Islamic component to Turkey's foreign policy, Erdogan feeling betrayed by Olmert for launching the attacks just days after his visit to Ankara with no mention of Israeli thinking, and the sense that the Gaza Crisis undermined Turkey's opportunity to gain regional credibility by mediating the Israel/Syria talks. Following large demonstrations outside the Israeli Embassy in Ankara and its consulate in Istanbul while hostilities were occurring in Gaza, Levi told the Ambassador that the security situation had died down following the ceasefire. The mission's families have returned from their brief evacuation. He reported, however, that the harsh GOT rhetoric and public reaction has already had a negative economic impact on

Turkey, noting winter tourism from Israel has dropped 70 percent and summer reservations have also fallen.

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Jeffrey